

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL TABRIZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 102

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL ADANA

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L TABRIZ 32

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652; GDS

TAGS: PINS, MOPS, IR, IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQI KURDISH WAR: FAILURE OF IRAQI SUMMER OFFENSIVE

REF: TABRIZ 20

SUMMARY: THE IRAQI OFFENSIVE BEGUN IN AUGUST APPEARS TO HAVE SPUTTERED, FLARED AND FINALLY GONE OUT. NEW TERRITORIAL GAINS SINCE MID-SUMMER HAVE BEEN FEW AND KURDISH HEAD-QUARTERS AND CAMPS IN THE HAJ-I OMRAN/CHOMEN AREA REMAIN SECURE. THE IRANIANS HAVE MAINTAINED ONE SUPPLY LINE AND REESTABLISHED A SECOND LINE BYPASSING THE CAPTURED TOWN OF QUALAH DIZAH. IRAQI TROOPS IN RUWANDUZ ARE STUCK IN THE HIGH MOUNTAINS EAST OF TOWN AGAINST INCREASINGLY TOUGH KURDISH DEFENSES. RAIN IS ALREADY FALLING IN THE VALLEYS AND THE FIRST SNOWS OF WINTER ARE CREEPING DOWN FROM THE HIGH MOUNTAINS. THE CHANCES SEEM EXCELLENT THAT THE KURDS CAN RECOVER MOST OF THE LOST GROUND DURING THE WINTER. IN WESTERN IRAN MOST KURDISH REFUGEES HAVE COM-
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PLETED THE MOVE TO CEMENT BUILDINGS TO WAIT OUT THE WINTER.

THE MOOD ON THE FRONTIER IS OPTIMISTIC. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING PERIOD NOV 23-27 I TRAVELED IN BORDER AREA OF WEST AZERBAIJAN. SOURCES THAT HAVE PROVED EXTREMELY RELIABLE IN PAST INDICATED THAT IRAQI OFFENSIVE REPORTED REFTEL HAS GROUND TO HALT WITH FEW ADDITIONAL GAINS. AT QALAH DIZAH INCREASING ARTILLERY FIRE HAS FORCED REGULAR IRAQI UNITS TO PULL OUT OF CITY LEAVING ONLY A LIGHT FORCE OF ANTI-BARZANI KURDISH MERCENARIES IN TOWN. FROM OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN TO BORDER BARZANI KURDS IN COMPLETE CONTROL. MIDWAY ALONG ROAD BETWEEN SARDASHT AND PIRANSHAHR (KHANEH ON MANY MAPS) IRANIANS HAVE BUILT NEW ROAD TO, AND PERHAPS BEYOND, BORDER. SUPPLIES FROM SARDASHT ARE AGAIN FLOWING FREELY AROUND QALAH DIZAH BASIN INTO IRAQ. THE ROAD IS LOW QUALITY DIRT BUT SCRAPERS AND BULLDOZERS I SAW STATIONED AT ROAD JUNCTION CAN PROBABLY KEEP IT OPERATING THROUGHOUT WINTER.

2. BETWEEN QALAH DIZAH AND RUWANDUZ THE COUNTRY IS UNDER KURDISH CONTROL. LARGE IRAQI FORCES DO MOVE BETWEEN THESE TWO TOWNS BUT THEY HAVE FAILED EITHER TO FORTIFY ROAD OR TO OPEN UP MORE EASTERLY TRACK THAT WOULD HAVE OUTFLANKED MOST DIFFICULT MOUNTAINS EAST OF RUWANDUZ. MOST SERIOUS FIGHTING OF THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS HAS BEEN IN MOUNTAINS AROUND RUWANDUZ, AN OBSERVATION CONFIRMED BY BRITISH RADAR TECHNICIANS IN TABRIZ WHO HAVE OBSERVED REGULAR AND HEAVY IRAQI AIRCRAFT ACTIVITY IN THIS AREA FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. OPINIONS DIFFER AS TO HOW MUCH OF ZOZAKH MOUNTAIN KURDS HOLD BUT CLEARLY THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PUSHED OFF ENTIRELY AND IRAQI TROOPS HAVE BEEN UNABLE ADVANCE MUCH BEYOND RUWANDUZ DURING LAST TWO MONTHS. LIMITED BUILDUP OF KURDISH ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONS HAS BEEN STRONGEST IN THIS AREA. MOST OF THE IRAQI ARMY STILL REMAINS COMMITTED TO EASTERN OPERATIONS AND FIGHTING IN OTHER AREAS HAS NOT BEEN SIGNIFICANT.

3. KURDS ARE SAID TO HAVE RECEIVED NEW CLOTHING FOR WINTER OFFENSIVE. THIS PROBABLY TRUE SINCE ALMOST ALL OF SEVERAL HUNDRED PISH MERGAS SEEN IN WESTERN AZERBAIJAN
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WERE WEARING NEW OVERCOATS AND SHOES. DESPITE KNOWN IRAQI PREPARATIONS TO FIGHT IN WINTER ALL OPINION ALONG BORDER IS THAT KURDS WILL SCORE MAJOR GAINS IN THE MOUNTAINS ONCE WINTER GROUND CLOSURE AIR SUPPORT AND LIMITS TANKS TO MAIN ROADS. GIVEN PROVEN KURDISH ABILITY TO HOLD GROUND, RAID, AND COUNTERATTACK DURING SUMMER I ESTIMATE IT HIGHLY LIKELY THAT KURDS WILL RETAKE MOST OF GROUND LOST SINCE EARLY AUGUST, POSSIBLY FORCE IRAQI

WITHDRAWAL FROM RUWANDUZ DUE LACK OF SUPPLIES AND PROBABLY CONTAIN IRAQI FORCES AROUND QALAH DIZAH IN FLAT AREA AROUND THE CITY.

4. IRANIAN TROOPS ALONG BORDER MAINTAIN HIGH STATE OF ALERT WITH ARTILLERY AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS DEPLOYED AROUND CAMPS. SUPPLIES CONTINUE MOVING TO KURDS AS REPORTED REFTEL WITH EXCEPTION THAT MORE ARTILLERY AND ANTI-TANK WEAPONS NOW BEING SENT. IN NO CASE ARE KURDS RECEIVING LEVEL OF ARMS NEEDED TO MOVE OUT OF MOUNTAINS. MOST REFUGEES NOW REPORTED TO HAVE MOVED TO WINTER CAMPS AND CAMP VIEWED NEAR SARDASHT IS COMPLETED WITH SOLID BUILDINGS FOR 10-12,000 WHERE NOTHING EXISTED FOUR MONTHS AGO. SOME REFUGEES STILL IN TENTS AS FLOW CONTINUES HEAVIER THAN EARLY PROJECTIONS. THERE ARE NO RPT NO SIGNS OF WEAKENING OF KURDISH MORALE OR UNITY. THIS PROBABLY INFLUENCED BY ABILITY STOP IRAQI OFFENSIVE AND BY CONTINUED EVIDENCE THAT IRANIANS PREPARED TO DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO KEEP KURDS FROM LOSING. SHORT OF A CHANGE IN IRANIAN POLICY, OR COLLAPSE OF GOVERNMENT IN BAGHDAD, THERE IS NO REASON TO EXPECT AN EARLY END TO THIS WAR.
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